The Army and Vietnam

ANDREW F. KREPINEVICH, JR.

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Attention to the Strategy of Action

A Strategy of Tactics

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Westmoreland explicitly rejected the alternative of paying less attention to the enemy’s big units and breaking down U.S. units into smaller groups to concentrate on pacification. His position was rooted in the military operations conducted by the VC in November 1964, when they mounted a limited offensive in Binh Dinh Province. In their attacks, two VC regiments defeated a number of smaller ARVN units engaged in pacification operations. Speaking of this defeat in detail, Westmoreland maintained that “it was a lesson long to be remembered.” He cited it as an example, saying that if he broke any U.S. forces down to engage in pacification, they would suffer the same fate. Yet the incident was more a rationalization for the big-unit operations favored by MACV than an objective lesson against the perils of maintaining insufficient quick-reaction reserves, the real cause of the ARVN’s November debacle. That MACV possessed these quick-reaction units in the form of its airborne forces and thus could afford to concentrate heavily on pacification was a point that was lost on the MACV Staff and their superiors.

Westmoreland’s approach was seconded by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. Earle Wheeler. As Wheeler saw it, “the ground operations in the South would increase the communists’ consumption and the bombing would reduce [their] supply.” MACV simply developed a strategy to suit the Army’s preferred modus operandi, force structure, and doctrine. According to Westmoreland, “Superior American firepower would be most advantageously employed against the big units, and using it in remote regions would mean fewer civilian casualties and less damage to built-up areas.” Again General Wheeler agreed, contending that U.S. combat power and mobility “will enable us to find the enemy more often, fix him more firmly when we find him, and defeat him when we fight him . . . our objective will be to keep the combat tempo at such a rate that the Viet Cong will be unable to take the time to recuperate or regain their balance.” It was Harkins’s Old Plan Explosion all over again. This approach, Wheeler concluded, “provides a strategy which, in my opinion, gives the best assurance of military victory in South Vietnam.”

Westmoreland, like Taylor, argued that given the geographical limitations involved, there was no alternative to attrition. He claimed that population security could not be provided if the enemy’s big units were at large. When it was pointed out that 90 percent of the country’s population lived along the narrow coastal plain and in the Delta and that VC battalions in the remote, sparsely populated Highlands would be isolated from the people, Westmoreland demurred, contending that “it was not enough merely to contain the big units. They had to be pounded with artillery and bombs and eventually brought to battle on the ground if they were not forever to remain a threat.”

This was essential if the Army’s strategy of attrition was to succeed. Yet Westmoreland himself revealed the fatal flaw in this strategy. What if the enemy’s big units refused to fight? What if they continued to wage an insurgency in the traditional sense, with the people, instead of the opponent’s military forces being the objective? The general conceded that “unlike the guerrillas, if we avoided battle, we could never succeed. We could never destroy the big units by leaving them alone.” Yet the guerrillas avoided battle and drew the Americans away from the population. As Westmoreland later admitted, “From the first the primary emphasis of the North Vietnamese focused on the Central Highlands and the central coastal provinces, with the basic end of drawing American units into remote areas and thereby facilitating control of the population in the lowlands.” By focusing on population control, Westmoreland might have forced the guerrillas to come to him. As things turned out, the Army would neither secure the population nor get its decisive battles with the insurgents.

Furthermore, either out of organizational hubris or slavishness to the Concept (or both), COMUSMACV ignored the lack of success of previous search-and-destroy operations. Even in the recent quasi-phase 3 period of the insurgency they had proved largely ineffective, as found in a MACV staff report submitted in March 1965 which found that ARVN search-and-destroy operations frequently “failed to establish any contact with major VC units.” Despite the ARVN’s shortcomings, the report concluded, “the ability of the VC to break contact and ‘disappear’ from view does not depend upon luck or some special technique” but on the inherent advantages that accrued to skilled insurgent forces.

For Westmoreland, this process of fitting the war to the Concept led to his perception of the insurgency as somewhat akin to a previous war in which standard Army operations had prevailed. As he saw it: “Vietnam was a war of movement, an area war. It was somewhat analogous to the [American] Civil War. There were certain troops in static positions, around base areas and airfields, but other than that it was a war of movement. Instead of having a horse, as was the case in the Civil War, we had the helicopter. It was a war of fluid situations. It was impossible for us to seize and hold terrain after seizing it because we didn’t have the troops . . . You ‘homed’ on the enemy as in the Civil War and tried to bring the enemy to combat. Once you’ve done that, then you regroup, move, and continue to try and find the enemy and force him to combat.”
The In Drew Valley and Valuation of the Contractor

Army forces defeated the communists in a major battle in the Drew Valley.

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or battalion commander as well. Units were also graded on what was called contact/success ratio, the number of times a contact with the enemy produced a body count.  

The division utilized many technical innovations in its operations. Ground radars and sensors were emplaced to detect enemy movement, whereupon troops were inserted to corner and destroy them. However, since the targets detected were often "moving and highly perishable," artillery fire support or air cavalry gunship support was often substituted for troops. Of course it was not always possible to verify whether the movement detected was that of the VC or of civilians. The division made prodigious use of its helicopters, often flying night (hunter-killer) missions using gunsights with searchlights mounted on them. On occasion, the gunships mistook civilians for the enemy. One officer who served on Ewell's staff recounted that some brigade commanders felt so pressured to get their quota of kills that they resorted to flying helicopters under unsafe conditions. One commander was observed "literally flying the blades off the helicopters and killing Americans to increase the body count."  

The measurement of unit effectiveness through body counts could not help but affect the manner in which the division's units operated. Commanders were threatened with relief if they did not meet their quotas. Indeed, Ewell once remarked to his assistant division commander, "They're [VC kills] getting harder to get." Whereupon the ADC replied, "Brigade commanders aren't." While General Ewell admitted that "you couldn't expect a guy to pump water out of a dry well" (that is, that units in areas of light activity would not run up as high a body count), he also noted that "if a battalion saw that some other battalion was getting four hundred or six hundred kills a month, and they were getting fifty, they'd immediately think, I'd better get off my ass and do something."  

Despite the push by units to meet their quota, the division staff appeared perplexed that, as one report noted, "units have been unsuccessful in their efforts to capture or destroy weapons in percentages commensurate with the number of enemy killed or captured." It was Ewell, however, who gave the best explanation for the division's abnormally low ratios of weapons captured to people killed: "The Riverine Force [one element of the 9th Division] had really good success for a year or more. Well, the Viet Cong weren't stupid and . . . they began to move elsewhere. Then, some of these operations would just fall on thin air. I mean, there wasn't anybody there even though you thought there was. It tended to be a little expensive in terms of friendly casualties." One officer in the division summed up the situation quite succinctly when he said, "We really blew a lot of civilians away."  

Reflective of the Army's priorities in South Vietnam is that Ewell was rewarded for his contribution toward reaching the crossover point. After his tour of command with the 9th Division, he was promoted to lieutenant general and placed in charge of an Army corps in Vietnam. After the war, Ewell was asked by the Army to write down his methods for waging counterinsurgency as part of the Vietnam Studies series, in effect giving his methods official sanction and perpetuating them for use in future insurgency conflicts.  

Personnel Actions  
Soldiers familiar with the people, culture, and geography of the region in which they operate are indispensable to a successful counterinsurgency program. The experience gained by government forces operating in one area for an extended period of time provides them with a knowledge of the terrain and people as intimate as that of the guerrilla, allowing for effective patrolling, particularly at night, better selection of ambush locations, improved population control, and good relations with the people, among other things. And, of course, military units perform better the longer they work together. As Napoleon once said, "Soldiers have to eat soup together for a long time before they are ready to fight."  

Yet the Army in Vietnam instituted a personnel policy about as detrimental to the conduct of counterinsurgency operations as it if had set out with the worst intentions in mind. The Army gave priority to those personnel actions concerning tour lengths and duty assignments that promoted traditional service goals rather than successful counterinsurgency operations. As the deployment of U.S. ground forces became a reality in early 1965, General Westmoreland sent a message to the JCS requesting that the twelve-month standard tour length be increased to nineteen months; but this applied only to general officers and a select number of key personnel. While the request was approved by the secretary of defense, the Army moved no further toward extending combat tours, even when large numbers of ground forces were deployed that summer. The standard tour remained twelve months in length; furthermore, officers in command positions could serve only six months before being transferred.  

Why the insistence on such short tours in a war that demanded a protracted commitment of individuals to a given area? Generals Johnson
to January 1970. Dawkins found that once the Army introduced its
main-force units, the perceived career impact of province/district advisory
duty changed dramatically (see table 4).145 The Army officer and non-commissioned
officers realized that main-force units were where the action was; furthermore,
efforts made by the Army beginning in 1967 to make advisory duty more
attractive did not convince these men, who remained skeptical (and rightly
so as it turned out) of the benefits.

The upgrading of advisory duty received some support from the Office
of the Secretary of the Army. Shortly before the Chief of Staff began to
actively promote advisory duty in 1967, he received a memo from Under
Secretary of the Army David E. McGiffert, who had been in South
Vietnam for a look at the pacification program. McGiffert wanted the
Army to respond to the problems that he saw in the advisory effort:
Advisers, he said, believe a command assignment to a unit in a combat
zone is far and away the best ticket to promotion.... Furthermore,
because our best people tend to be assigned or picked off by the tactical
units or headquarters in Saigon, we are probably not on the average
putting our most competent people into the advisory positions.146 The
under secretary’s views coincided with those submitted in a MACV report
noting that “concern has been expressed that officers assigned as division
or sector/province advisors consider the slot as a temporary one until they
can find a position in a US unit [and] that they do not view advisory duty
with a sufficient degree of importance. It is almost axiomatic that a
competent and ambitious officer considers a command position in a US
unit as preferable to any other position, including advisory positions.”147

Although MACV and the Army Staff supported measures to make
advisory duty more attractive, the men in the field refused to believe that
service outside main-force units (battalions, brigades, and so on) could
enhance their career. For example, a strong majority of officers felt that
promotion and senior service school boards gave advisory work less
weight than command time (see table 5).148 In the Humrro survey 47
percent felt that combat experience as an adviser did not help their career

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<tr>
<th>War</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Career Advantage</th>
<th>Career Detriment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>January 1962–September 1965</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>October 1965–June 1967</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>49.5</td>
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Source: Peter M. Dawkins, “The United States Army and the ‘Other War’ in Vietnam: A Study of the
Complexity of Implementing Organizational Change” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1979), p. 79.

as much as combat service with a U.S. unit and 63 percent agreed that
command time as an adviser helped them less than command of a U.S.
unit. The survey also found that even after the Army incentive program
had been initiated, only 24 percent of those serving as advisers had
requested the assignment.149 Oddly enough, early promotion to lieutenant
colonel and colonel among those surveyed by General Dawkins ran
slightly better than the Army-wide average. Nevertheless, many advisers
viewed this as a short-run phenomenon; they believed that once the war
wound down and the shortage of advisers ended (no one expected counterinsurgency to remain a significant part of the Army’s mission),
they would be on the outside looking in as the Army redirected itself to
traditional operations.150

The perception of many officers and non-commissioned officers that advisory duty was undesirable served to lower the quality of personnel involved in
the program. The tour length of twelve months (later extended to eighteen)
also reduced the effectiveness of the advisory effort. According to Lt.
Gen. Cao Van Vien, head of the JGS,

The good performance of a tactical adviser, however, seemed to depend on a
certain continuity and stability of effort devoted to a unit. This would require him
to stay at least 18 months with a unit, but two years would have been better. The
one-year tour . . . did not maintain enough continuity to make the advisory effort
as effective as desired. . . .

Time was also required for the adviser to demonstrate his abilities, obtain
confidence and to establish his influence within a unit. He needed opportunities to
prove himself and to show the ARVN troops what he could do for them. Only then
would his advice be welcomed and his recommendations heartily accepted.151

In addition to the inadequate tour length, a lack of training in both
language and counterinsurgency operations handicapped advisers. The
Humrro survey discovered that only 194 out of 605 individuals surveyed
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the valley was noted. The main purpose of these raids was procurement of food stuffs." 

A MACV report at the time noted that all major commanders considered herbicide use to be beneficial for military operations and wanted herbicides used much more extensively. While the Army felt that herbicide use was beneficial in the conduct of military operations, a number of civilian studies concluded that their use was detrimental to the conduct of the war as a whole. A RAND Corporation evaluation of defoliation noted "no significant relationship . . . between [VC] rice rations and the percentage of regional rice lands sprayed." On the other hand, "the civilian population seems to carry very nearly the full burden of the results of the crop destruction program; it is estimated that over 500 civilians experience crop loss for every ton of rice denied the VC." In effect, the VC were confiscating crops from the people (as in the case of the raids on the Montagnards mentioned above) to make up for any shortfalls caused through defoliation. The report contended that "the basic reason for the low effectiveness of the program is that the VC are a very small percentage of the population, yet they control or have access to almost the entire rural economy in one fashion or another." 

Thus, the inability of the U.S., allied, and GVN forces to effect a workable population security program resulted in the people's shouldering the burden of the herbicide program. The RAND study concluded that its results strongly implied "that the relationship between the VC and the rice economy is so intimate and pervasive that significant or crippling effects on VC rice consumption would result only if a major proportion (perhaps 50 percent or more) of the rural economy were destroyed." A study done by the U.S. embassy in Saigon concluded that "the VC/NVA grow somewhat less than 10% of their requirements. On the average, therefore, we destroyed more than ten times as much rice as the VC/NVA grew." 

Interrogation of captured VC supported the conclusions of these studies. Concerning rations for VC soldiers, "whenever soldiers report that the population was short for rice, the soldiers still ate, and . . . if they ran short of food on rare occasions due to battle dislocations, the matter was invariably immediately remedied. This would indicate that crop destruction, while depriving the villagers, continues to fail in denying food to the enemy." 

As one former South Vietnamese official recalled, the defoliation program was not executed with an eye toward winning the heart and minds of the population. Because there were no absolute bars against crop destruction there, local officials ignored the vulnerability of the Montagnard farms to defoliants used in the jungles. . . . This exacerbated the general ill-feeling of the Montagnards toward the government and was exploited by the Communists to good effect. . . .

The attitude of some of our local officials was not calculated to win the hearts and minds of the people. Some of them would tell their people that if they wanted to be spared the effects of defoliations, they either had to rid themselves of the enemy, or had to leave their homes to settle in government controlled areas. This "take it or leave it" line was not only unfair but counterproductive. How could the people chase the enemy from their areas? 

These were the same Montagnards whose crop destruction from defoliation was viewed by Army field commanders as a great success. Compensation for crops destroyed by defoliants was planned for; however, the bureaucratic apparatus set up to process the claims of the peasants was grossly inefficient. It usually took at least eight months to process a claim; even then, the proportion of the compensation to the actual loss was very low. 

The Army's approach to the use of herbicides and defoliants fit neatly into its Concept. It represented an attempt at effecting a technological fix to a problem that was not amenable to such a solution. The only sure way to deny the insurgents logistical support from the people was to deny them access to those people. When the Army adopted a big-unit war of attrition, it abandoned any idea of pursuing the counterinsurgent's traditional role. The Army looked at defoliation in military terms and ignored the broader political and social damage. The people, not the VC, suffered the resulting food shortages. Alienation of the population followed, fueled to some extent by VC propaganda, which, true or not, was often effective. 

Conclusion

Army operations in South Vietnam were oriented overwhelmingly toward the Army Concept, with its bias toward mid-intensity conflict, big-unit operations, and minimization of U.S. casualties through heavy firepower. The attrition strategy developed by MACV provided for the scaling of priorities, incentives, and rewards according to how well units operated according to traditional Army principles. The result was that any changes that might have come about through the service's experience in Vietnam were effectively short-circuited by Army goals and policies: tours were kept short, field commanders' missions were kept simple (kill VC), firepower was readily available to accomplish the attrition strategy, and inflated body counts were acceptable, if not officially promoted. By the
To be successful, preemption must combine security with insurance. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the situation this way: "A preemptive strike... is a situation where the mind is ahead of the army, where the preemption is done before the problem begins. The army, though it is a problem, can still be handled by our forces. But if we wait until the problem begins, it is too late."

Netanyahu's statement highlights the importance of preemption in national security. The concept of preemption involves taking action against a potential threat before it becomes a现实, thereby preventing a crisis from escalating.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a prime example of a situation where preemption has been a central aspect of the policy. Israel's statements and actions, particularly during the 2000-2001 conflict, reflect the nation's commitment to preemptive defense. This approach is rooted in the belief that prevention is better than cure, especially in cases where a crisis might lead to a larger conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a long-standing issue, with preemption playing a significant role in the nation's strategy. The Israeli military's operations during the 2000-2001 conflict, for instance, were focused on preempting potential attacks and securing national interests.

The concept of preemption in national security is complex and requires careful consideration of various factors, including military capabilities, political considerations, and international law. It is a strategy that is often debated and discussed in the context of national security and defense policies.
99. Ibid. (my emphasis).
100. Henry Cabot Lodge to the President, 20 July 1965, CMH, 2.

Chapter 6. A Strategy of Tactics

2. Interview with Brig. Gen. Edwin L. Powell by Col. Clyde H. Patterson, Jr., 4 March 1971, MH.
5. Henry Brandon, Anatomy of Error (Boston: Gambit, 1969), 29. As noted, the alternative approach to MACV’s concept of operations was the enclave strategy. Yet they were but two sides of the same coin in MACV’s eyes. The only question was whether U.S. or South Vietnamese forces would carry the burden of search-and-destroy operations.

7. Interview with Westmoreland, 13 March 1971, 11.
8. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 145.
10. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, 146.
13. Ibid., 194.

Chapter 8. The “Other” War

   The Army was left virtually untouched in the reappportionment of assets toward pacification. It has been suggested that McNamara, fearing an open rift with the Joint Chiefs, decided not to press the issue.
11. See, for example, Collins, *South Vietnamese Army*, 71; Vien et al., *The U.S. Advisor*, 131; Thayer, “How to Analyze a War,” 883; Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era*, 244; and Thomas C. Thayer, “Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces,” in *A Systems Analysis View of the Vietnam War*, ed. Thomas C. Thayer (Columbus, Ohio: Battelle Columbus Laboratories, 1975), 6:90–91. By April 1969 the territorial forces had received enough m-16s to equip about half of their forces. A lack of radios, however, continued to hamper PF operations.
16. Ibid., 261. The measurements were obtained using the HES scores, the yardstick of measurement employed by CORDS to plot progress or regression in the pacification effort.
18. Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, 52; Vien et al., *The U.S. Advisor*, 128; Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, 183; MACV, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff (J-2), “Viet Cong Targeting of the People’s Defense Forces,” 10 March 1969, MH, 1. At that time, many PF duties were assumed by the People’s Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) as part of a program of national mobilization initiated after the Tet Offensive. The GVN claimed that between 3 million and 4 million men were in the PSDF by 1971, although this number is generally considered to be highly inflated. The rapid growth of the PSDF program made it a prime target for VC infiltration and subversion.
24. Ibid., 57–58.
35. Thayer, “How to Analyze a War,” 913.
44. F. J. West, Jr., *The Strike Teams: Tactical Performance and Strategic